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SIPDIS

FROM U.S. MISSION IN ROME

SENSITIVE

ASMARA FOR AMBASSADOR MCCONNELL AND USAID DIRECTOR CHEEMA  
STATE FOR AS/PRM DEWEY, PRM/P, AF/E AND IO/EDA BEHREND AND  
KOTOK  
USAID FOR AA/DCHA WINTER, DCHA/FFP LANDIS, AFR/EA  
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USUN FOR AMBASSADOR NEGROPONTE AND MLUTZ  
BRUSSELS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS AND USAID/LERNER  
NSC FOR JDWORKEN AND AFRICA DIRECTORATE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [AORC](#) [PREF](#) [KUNR](#) [WFP](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: WFP BOARD APPROVES SUDAN (ERITREAN REFUGEES)  
PROTRACTED RELIEF AND RECOVERY OPERATION (PRRO) VALUED AT  
U.S. DOLLARS (USD) 15.52 MILLION - 35,344 METRIC TONS

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SUMMARY  
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1. (SBU) The WFP Executive Board, at its first regular session (February 23-26), approved a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation for Sudan (Eritrean refugees). The project 10122.1, entitled Food Assistance for Eritrean Refugees, is for two years (April 2004 - March 2006) with a total cost to WFP of USD 15.52 million. Beneficiaries are estimated at 95,300 (April 2004 to December 2004) and 60,000 (January 2005 - March 2006). Over the life-of-project, WFP will supply (subject to the availability of funds) a total of 35,344 metric tons of food aid. The Netherlands raised the concern that the Government of Eritrea is now reportedly imposing internal travel restrictions on UN personnel, which could impede their carrying out the UN's humanitarian mission. WFP's regional manager Holdbrook Arthur will visit Eritrea March 7-10 and inter alia would like to discuss this matter with U.S. Embassy Asmara. End summary.

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Background  
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2. (U) This is one of Africa's longest running refugee situations, involving some 160,000 Eritreans, many of whom fled to Sudan during the civil strife occurring under the Mengistu regime and in some cases even earlier, during the reign of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. In March 2001, Eritrea and Sudan agreed on an eventual repatriation. However, following closure of the border between Sudan and Eritrea in early October 2002, the UN was forced to halt the on going repatriation efforts. In June 2003, the GOS and the GOE (under the auspices of UNHCR) reached agreement on the modalities of repatriation that led in turn to the repatriation of 1,652 Eritreans prior to the recent onset of rains. Approximately 95,300 UNHCR/WFP-assisted Eritrean refugees still remain in Sudan, presently living in 8 camps (consolidated from 20 camps previously in June 2003) located in four states of eastern Sudan. Camp populations are as follows: Kassala state (71,426); Gedaref (16,338); Wad Madani (Gazira state), 1,280; Sennar state (2,244); transfers from the closed camp of UM Sagata (approximately 3,500).

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U.S. intervention in support of approval of the Sudan  
(Eritrean refugees) PRRO  
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3. (U) Herewith the essence of the supportive U.S. intervention:

-USDEL notes that since the May 2001 repatriation agreement, some 47,000 Eritreans have returned home through UNHCR convoys and another 58,000 have returned through their own means - a total of 105,000 returnees.

-The UN position, which USDEL shares, is that the root

causes of the Eritrean refugee problem no longer exist, as fundamental and durable changes have occurred with the end

of the 30-year-old war with Ethiopia in 1991, Eritrean independence in 1993, and the Ethiopian-Eritrean cease-fire agreement of June 2000.

-USDEL appreciates the comment of UN High Commissioner Lubbers during his visit to Eritrea in November 2003 that: "The return operation needs to go beyond crossing the border." We note that Eritrea is one of four countries that have been chosen by UNHCR for the pilot testing of a new initiative "the 4Rs" - Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction - designed to create a conducive environment to facilitate and sustain return.

-Finally, USDEL expects that the joint UNHCR-Government of Sudan screening teams will remain fully operative in the eastern regions of Kassala, Wad Madani (Gezira), Sennar and Gedaref in order to further clarify and finalize: a) the number of Eritreans still in need of international protection; and b) the number applying to remain as immigrants.

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U.S. support to WFP's Sudan PRRO for Eritrean refugees  
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14. (U) Against the two previous PRROs (6189.0 and 10122.0 which cover the period May 2000-end April 2004), with a combined requirement of USD 28.28 million (73,431 metric tons), U.S. contributions are USD 10.14 million (26,845 metric tons). Japan is the second largest donor with a contribution of USD 5.35 million (17,125 metric tons).

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Other donor comments  
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15. (SBU) The Netherlands raised two critical issues: a) that roughly a third of Eritrea's population is now classified as food insecure, not a good omen for returning refugees; and b) they understand that the Government of Eritrea is now imposing internal travel restrictions on UN personnel which could impede their carrying out the UN's humanitarian mission.

16. (SBU) The Eritrean delegate (Eritrea is a member of the Board) went into a lengthy and hard to follow rambling which seemed to imply that the UN was being "punished" for not being more active in persuading Ethiopia to accept the demarcation suggested by an independent boundary commission, which emanated from the Ethiopian-Eritrean peace deal concluded in Algiers in 2002.

17. (SBU) Note. Without entering into detail, WFP regional manager Holdbrook Arthur conveyed to US Mission privately that there are some "difficulties." He personally had to wait ten days for a visa. He will visit Eritrea March 7-10 and inter alia would like to discuss this matter with U.S. Embassy Asmara. End note.

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Executive Board approval  
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18. (U) The WFP Board approved the Protracted Relief and

Recovery Operation for Sudan (Eritrean refugees). The project 10122.1, entitled Food Assistance for Eritrean Refugees, is for two years (April 2004 - March 2006) with a total cost to WFP of USD 15.52 million. Beneficiaries are estimated at 95,300 (April 2004 to December 2004) and 60,000 (January 2005 - March 2006). Over the life-of-project, WFP will supply (subject to the availability of funds) a total of 35,344 metric tons of food aid. Hall

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